

Chapter 7

Neighborhoods, Historic Preservation and Housing



“Livable neighborhoods; cleaner neighborhoods; more housing.”

“Birmingham has a sweet and vibrant historical aspect that most certainly needs preservation. We will always be known for it, but we can also create new interests and opportunities for our city...there should be more options.”

GOALS	POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS
communities and neighborhoods	
Neighborhoods are enhanced by investments to improve quality of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support strategic initiatives with integrated investments to improve the physical, environmental, functional, and social conditions and make a visible difference. • Support creation of framework plans for Birmingham’s Communities, incorporating existing neighborhoods plans as appropriate. • Coordinate with the Housing Authority, School Department, county, state, and federal agencies about locating new facilities and disposition of properties.
“Urban Villages” and community/neighborhood centers provide access to retail and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus investments to support walkable neighborhood commercial districts, including Main Street districts and compact centers along arterials. • Locate public facilities, civic and cultural uses within or adjacent to neighborhood commercial districts to act as anchors.
City neighborhoods have a good public image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a marketing program for the city as a place to live, work, study, and play.
The Citizen Participation Plan continues to serve residents and the city well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the citizen participation system.
historic preservation	
The integrity and character of distinctive historic structures and districts is maintained and enhanced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate city programs and policies to support historic preservation.
Historic preservation initiatives support and invigorate community/neighborhood renewal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support programs and incentives for historic preservation that renew neighborhoods and commercial districts, and further economic development.
housing	
A comprehensive housing policy supports quality neighborhoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a community-based system to develop and implement a citywide housing policy that includes stakeholders from government, the nonprofit sector, and the private sector.
All housing is in good condition and code compliant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support effective, efficient, and sensitive code enforcement efforts.
Quality housing meets the diverse needs of households at all income levels and all stages of the life cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the planning, regulatory and funding initiatives needed to provide a diversity of housing types, rental and ownership, market-rate and assisted, to meet community needs.

findings

COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS

The majority of the neighborhoods and housing in the city date from before 1960.

For historical reasons, some neighborhoods are located in environmentally compromised locations (for example, near industrial sites with a history of pollution or in flood plains) and have experienced significant population declines.

In a few neighborhoods, strategic and focused attention by nonprofits, foundations, faith-based groups, and resident investment has created momentum for revitalization.

Retail vacancy rates in neighborhood commercial districts are high.

Long commercial corridors that border or go through neighborhoods are characterized by low-density, low-value development and high levels of vacancy.

REV Birmingham's Main Street program includes nine neighborhood commercial districts, but has been underfunded and understaffed.

External changes and applications for demolition permits for properties located in a designated Commercial Revitalization District are subject to urban design review.

The neighborhood/community system of public participation was established in the 1970s and based on a larger population and a different climate for community development funding.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Birmingham has 146 individual sites and multi-site historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including three National Historic Landmarks, nine historic fire stations, and three historic apartment hotel groupings. It also has 40 National Register Historic Districts with multiple properties. Property owners can make changes or demolish properties listed on the National Register that are not located in a local historic district or a Commercial Revitalization District or are not

subject to a historic preservation easement, as long as they conform to federal, state, and local law.

There are nine local historic districts in which property owners are subject to historic design review of exterior changes to the property.

HOUSING

Nearly two-thirds of Birmingham housing units are single family houses.

City of Birmingham households are almost equally divided between owners (49%) and renters (51%).

Housing vacancy rates are high: 18% of Birmingham's housing units are vacant—for rent or sale, or out of the market. Seven percent of total units are vacant and out of the market.

Some of Birmingham's housing stock is old and obsolete and does not meet modern demand.

Market rate housing is affordable to the household making the median regional income, but the city has many households with incomes well below the regional median.

The median sales price for a single family house in late 2011 was \$116,000, while the average cost of building a new house is \$130,000.

There are approximately 6,000 occupied publicly-assisted housing units owned by the Housing Authority or assisted through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. The Housing Authority also owns an additional unoccupied 1,951 units slated for improvements or other projects, and administers 5,138 housing choice vouchers (section 8). Two HOPE VI have successfully transformed public housing into mixed-income developments, downtown and in Ensley, and the Housing Authority has applied for a federal Choice Neighborhoods Initiative implementation grant to transform the Loveman public housing development in North Titusville.

Federal funding to the city for community development and housing programs has declined significantly since the 1980s.

findings (continued)

The need for decent, affordable housing remains high. Half of renters are estimated to spend more than 30% of their income on housing and 41% of homeowners spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

During the 2006-2011 period, encompassing the Great Recession, the sales price of City of Birmingham homes declined 27.5%.

High foreclosure rates add to housing market weakness or failure in some city neighborhoods. In December 2011, 38% of homes listed for sale in the city were in foreclosure.

challenges

Stabilizing the continuing trend of a decline in the number of households that creates an oversupply of housing.

Ensuring safe, decent and affordable housing to all households.

Strengthening weak housing markets that exist in a number of neighborhoods to promote market rate housing development.

Providing neighborhood support for all residents while taking a strategic approach to neighborhood and housing development.

Updating the neighborhood/community association system.

Providing neighborhood-serving retail and services in appropriate locations.

A. What the Community Said

During the public participation process, Birmingham residents and stakeholders identified the issues most important to them related to neighborhoods and housing:

- Many neighborhoods have good housing stock and opportunities for investment.
- In some neighborhoods, housing with code violations and blight affects the value of occupied homes in good repair.
- Residents all over the city would like better access to retail and services and the revitalization of traditional neighborhood commercial districts.
- Historic areas that do not have local historic districts need incentives to promote housing rehabilitation.
- Past development decisions allowing incompatible multifamily development affect nearby values.
- Absentee landlords need to be held accountable for maintenance and adequate conditions in rentals.

B. Understanding Neighborhoods

NOTE: For the purposes of this chapter, references in the text to official, city-designated neighborhood associations and communities that are part of the citizen participation process will be capitalized as “Neighborhood” and “Community.”

NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY

Neighborhood types and character

Creating neighborhoods of choice. Successful 21st century cities offer a high quality of life, and good neighborhoods are the bedrock of quality of life. Businesses locate where people want to be, and good neighborhoods, along with a great open-space system, a vibrant cultural life, and good transportation options rank among the key attractions that

any city can offer. As jobs increasingly follow people in the 21st century, rather than the other way around, investing in a high quality of life is also an economic development strategy.

Good neighborhoods are safe, clean and healthy, supported by well-maintained and well-run public services. They are comfortable and attractive, easy to access and get around, and provide multiple transportation choices for travel to and from the neighborhood. To many people, good city neighborhoods have the advantage of diversity, whether among the people who live there or the variety of uses and things to do. Ultimately, good neighborhoods are about people and connections. The physical and social organization of a neighborhood should encourage people to get to know and trust one another. Good neighborhoods often have traditions expressed in care for public places such as a school or park, in festivals, and in holiday activities.

In order to be successful, each neighborhood within the city, regardless of household income level, should provide safety; decent and sanitary housing; infrastructure and multi-modal transportation systems that are well-maintained; environmental and aesthetic amenities such as street trees; and easy access to parks, public spaces, and neighborhood retail and services. These are the characteristics of neighborhoods of choice.

Reinforcing urban neighborhood character and form in Birmingham.

Neighborhood character is a composite of many features that together give an area its distinctive physical form and appearance. These features tend to affect social interactions. For example, neighborhoods without sidewalks do not encourage walking. Features that help define a neighborhood’s character include streets, sidewalks, and street trees; the scale of buildings and public spaces; internal and external connections; building materials; architectural styles; land uses; the number and type of public and social spaces; historic features; and development types.

Many of Birmingham’s neighborhoods originated as separate small towns. Like the city center, these neighborhoods are typically characterized by a grid of connected streets for easy walking, small to medium sized house lots, houses that face the street, small blocks,

human-scaled commercial districts, and, in some cases, neighborhood parks. Neighborhoods built from the 1960s on have a more suburban character with winding streets and bigger blocks, and varying densities—for example, tightly platted subdivisions surrounded by vacant land, multifamily enclaves, or subdivisions on golf courses. These newer developments typically lack sidewalks, parks, and neighborhood centers. Birmingham residents who participated in the planning process, including those who prefer to live in the more suburban-style neighborhoods, made it clear that they desire more walkability and connectivity. Regulatory frameworks that emphasize the relationship of buildings to the street and the public realm can enhance walkability.

Understanding Neighborhood and Community types. Planning agencies typically put planning districts or neighborhoods into categories according to their needs. The Planning Division can perform an initial exercise of this type as it prepares the Framework Plans recommended later in the chapter (pp. 7.8–7.10). Typical criteria used for this purpose include:

- Percent Change in Population 2000-2010
- Median Income
- Poverty Rate
- Unemployment Rate
- Percent Owner Occupancy
- Median Home Value
- Home Vacancy Rate
- Acres Vacant Land
- Tax Delinquent Parcels (% of parcels)

For each variable (e.g., percent of tax delinquent parcels, median income, etc.), the range of values can be divided into equal sets, with a score of 1, 2 or 3, etc., given to each neighborhood or area for that variable, with “1” representing the most desirable end of the distribution (e.g., lower percent of tax delinquent parcels, higher median income). All scores are then totaled for each area. The areas are then divided into sets based on their relative scores. These groupings are then clarified as stable or in various degrees of transition. Potential categories for Birmingham include:

- *Stable Areas.* Stable areas have not been experiencing large changes in population or income and have

low rates of vacancy and blight. Their housing markets function well and private investment in renovations and new development occurs. Residents in these types of areas tend to be most concerned with assuring that their neighborhoods are safe and well-maintained, with good code enforcement, security, and high quality public services and public spaces. They focus on whether any infill development is compatible with neighborhood character and want development that occurs at the edges of the neighborhood to be positive, to incorporate appropriate transitions, and to avoid adverse impacts. Many of these areas have strong Neighborhood Associations. Stable areas need vigilance to make sure that they continue to do well. Maintenance and enforcement are critical tools in preserving stability, plus careful attention to neighborhood amenities, edges and transitions.

- *High Asset Transition Areas.* As the name implies, these areas are changing, with opportunities for an upward trajectory. They typically include a patchwork of subdistricts—some adjacent to stable areas, some with momentum for positive change, and some areas with evidence of disinvestment and vacancy. Efforts to enhance market rate development conditions and make neighborhood improvement in these areas need to be sensitive to submarket distinctions and focus on making the most of community assets.
- *High Walkability Transition Areas.* These areas often include older town centers retaining the street grids and some attractive housing stock that can be the foundation on which to revive walkable neighborhoods. However, while traditional neighborhood form is a good foundation for revitalization, a number of neighborhoods in these areas have a large number of vacant and abandoned properties and very poor housing markets. Strategies to revitalize these neighborhoods must be carefully targeted around community assets, adjacency to areas in better condition, existing or potential transit hubs, and must involve sufficient investment to bring critical mass.
- *High Alert Transition Areas.* These areas have experienced significant population loss, contain high numbers of tax-delinquent properties, boarded-up houses, vacant lots, deteriorated housing, and vacant commercial and industrial sites. Property markets are weak to nonexistent. Environmental hazards such as pollution and flooding are an issue in a number of locations. Revital-

ization efforts must begin with effective control of blight and vacancy, including land banking, environmental programs and careful targeting of improvements.

- *Niche Development Transition Areas.* Areas with high scores for acres of vacant land, but where much of this vacant land has not previously been developed, offer opportunities for open space and for development with specific characteristics that should be targeted to niche residential and commercial markets.

Understanding markets. Neighborhood image and the perceived quality of life in neighborhoods are essential components of how people make choices about where to live. Policies to support and improve neighborhoods must be informed by data and analysis of the city's existing housing markets and its competition. It is important to understand what kinds of households are the potential market for housing in the city, what kinds of neighborhoods and assets can appeal to those households—and then, on the basis of that information, develop a strategy to reach those target audiences with a message about Birmingham neighborhoods and Birmingham as a place to live that is responsive to what they are looking for. An even more detailed understanding of Neighborhood and Community types can be created with good information on real estate markets. Strategy 7.A.1 on p. 7.27 recommends preparation of a Market Value Analysis for Birmingham to help guide planning and revitalization decisions.

Linking neighborhoods with strategic opportunities. In order to make progress over the next twenty years in achieving the Birmingham vision for revitalized neighborhoods, strategic choices have to be made so that redevelopment and revitalization programs and investments create successful models that advance the overall competitiveness of the city. These investments have a critical role to play not only in improving quality of life for current residents, but in creating neighborhoods strong enough to attract private housing investment. The goal is to create successful mixed-income, racially diverse communities with a variety of housing choices in these “Strategic Opportunity Areas.” Further revitalization efforts can then be modeled on these successes.

The Citizen Participation Plan

Birmingham's citizen participation system was created in 1974 and revised four times since then, most recently in 2004. The Mayor's Office of Citizens Assistance administers the program, which was principally created to provide greater grassroots influence on the distribution of federal funds received by the City as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Two or more Neighborhoods make up a Community, which is governed by the elected officers of the Neighborhood Associations in a Citizen Advisory Committee. The presidents of the Citizen Advisory Committees make up the citywide Citizens Advisory Board (CAB). Officers of the various citizen groups are elected every two years. The current regulations that govern the system also provide for adjustment of Neighborhood and Community boundaries every two years, if desired.¹

In recent years, the decline in CDBG funds, city population, and the city budget have all resulted in a weakening of the system. While some Neighborhood Associations continue to be very robust, other areas have minimal turnout at elections and problems finding candidates for offices. Limited CDBG funds no longer allow significant regular allocations to all Neighborhood Associations for local projects. The Mayor's Office of Citizens Assistance has a smaller staff than was common in the past. Communication with Neighborhood and Community leaders and between leaders and neighborhood residents also appears to be less effective than in the past. A review and evaluation of the Citizen Participation Plan is needed to modernize the system and increase its effectiveness for 21st century Birmingham.

¹ *City of Birmingham Consolidated Plan 2010–2015*, Description of Citizen Participation Plan system and processes begins on p. 118.

C. Recommendations

goal 1

Neighborhoods are enhanced by investments to improve quality of life.

POLICIES

- Support strategic initiatives with integrated investments to improve the physical, environmental, functional, and social conditions and make a visible difference.
- Support creation of plans for Birmingham's Communities, incorporating existing neighborhood plans as appropriate.
- Coordinate with the Housing Authority, Birmingham Public Schools, the Transit Authority county, state, and federal agencies about locating new facilities and disposition of properties.

STRATEGIES

A. Develop a program for Strategic Opportunity Areas to focus a defined portion of public investments, incentives, and programs on neighborhoods with potential “urban villages” at their core.

To begin creating the high quality of neighborhood life that Birmingham residents called for in the public participation process—characterized by more connectivity, including better transit, and neighborhood-serving retail and services—it is necessary to focus resources and build up centers of greater density strategically. In a city environment, both transit and retail must be supported by clusters of sufficient household and population density. Over the decades, Birmingham has lost density, both through depopulation of traditional neighborhoods and development of suburban-style neighborhoods toward the edges of the city. Not including greater downtown (from the BJCC area to Five Points South), potential Strategic Opportunity Areas include Five Points West, Titusville, Carraway-Norwood, Woodlawn, and Parkway East.

Action

1. Identify and plan for potential urban village districts.

Criteria to identify these districts include market potential, presence of employment centers, location in relation to current and future plans for transit improvements, momentum from existing activities, urban form, and so on. Individual areas may not meet all the criteria. Because of the critical need in Birmingham and the region for better public transportation, the potential of a revitalized urban village to serve as a transit hub must be given special consideration. Example conceptual plans for urban villages at Five Points West and Woodlawn can be found in Chapter 14 (pp. 14.30–14.33).

B. Create a series of proactive “framework plans” to include all of Birmingham’s Communities to translate the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan to the community level and adopt these plans as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

In the past, the Neighborhood and Community system has been closely connected to the Community Development Department because that is where the funding was located. Planners in the Department of Planning, Engineering, and Permits, have been more focused on reviewing and permitting development proposals. Since 2004, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (www.rpcbg.org) and the Auburn University Urban Studio have prepared neighborhood plans at the request of Neighborhood Associations. The RPCGB has prepared plans or basic planning frameworks, often though not always with a transportation focus, for Collegeville, Fountain Heights 16th Street Corridor, Highland Park, and, as of 2012, was beginning a plan for the Thomas Neighborhood and North Titusville. The Urban Studio students have prepared plans for Norwood, College Hills and Graymont, Lakeview, and Pratt City. Similarly, federal funding for Choice Neighborhoods Initiative implementation grants, for which the Housing Authority applied in 2012 for the redevelopment of Loveman Village public housing in North Titusville, require a broader neighborhood plan for mixed income development.

The City's Planning Division has typically played a limited role in these planning efforts, which, in any case, tend to be isolated requests for planning expertise on the neighborhood level, rather than the creation of guidelines within the broader context of a planning strategy for the city. By creating Framework Plans at a Community scale and integrating them into the Comprehensive Plan, there will be more coordination and collaboration on the neighborhood level under the umbrella of the overall vision and strategies of the Comprehensive Plan. Neighborhood-level planning will be the expression of principles, guidelines and strategies that extend from the comprehensive plan's overarching Vision and Principles to local action items in the Framework Plan.

Actions

1. Planners from the City's Planning Division work with Communities in order to develop long-term expertise and relationships.

In order for the City to have a more comprehensive planning approach, planners need to understand the conditions and issues in all parts of the City. This work will involve attending Community meetings when requested as well as during the Framework Planning process in order to get to know the concerns and issues of residents. Planners will work with residents to create plans, identify needs, develop solutions, and provide technical assistance. The Planning Division is uniquely qualified to work with Communities to assist them with issues relating to revitalization and physical development. By developing a more detailed expertise of localized issues, the Planning Division and the Planning Commission can also play a more effective role in supporting the integration of transportation and land use policies, and advice on strategic deployment of resources. An important part of the role of Planner will also be to work with the Mayor's Offices of Citizen Assistance and Economic Development, the Community Development Department, the Housing Authority, the MPO, local institutions and other organizations that can affect neighborhood life.

2. Engage neighborhood groups, students and volunteers to perform rapid "community audits" of the public realm to aid in developing the framework plans, targeting and prioritizing resources for public improvements.

Neighborhood audits provide information and promote priority-setting about how to target resources for public improvements. The Planning Division can work with local organizations, such as neighborhood associations, churches, schools, college students, or other groups to develop a consistent format for neighborhood-based inventories of the condition of sidewalks, streets, lighting, street trees, drains, blighted properties, and so on. Regularly scheduled annual Neighborhood Audit Walks, in which neighbors walk a particular route (using different routes each year) and note issues of concern, would be one way to make this a consistent process. Today's smartphones, tablets, and apps, when available, make it easy to enter information into a spreadsheet, obviating the need to enter data later. Neighbors could then prioritize the issues that need attention, taking into account any City criteria that government agencies make available to them.

These audits must then be organized and presented to the Chief of Operations and City departments for inclusion in their work plans and any future asset management systems. (See Chapter 13, pp. 13.17–13.18, for recommendations on asset management systems.) The City must also create a response system to acknowledge the work of Neighborhood Associations, provide the criteria used to evaluate competing improvement projects, and provide information on progress being made on neighborhood priorities,



Smartphones can be used for neighborhood surveys, as illustrated here for a Boston abandoned property survey. http://www.communityprogress.net/filebin/pdf/rvp_conf/presentations/1B_Delgado_Laura_DataDrivenTools.pdf

including explanations of funding difficulties and any other barriers to implementation.

Some neighborhood groups in Birmingham have already been doing some work of this type. For example, in approximately 2007-8, Friends of West End, a coalition of several Neighborhood Associations, did a survey of blighted properties in the Arlington/West End neighborhood and developed a list of properties for rehabilitation and demolition. Twelve owners of vacant properties were contacted about making improvements. Half of them did so and the properties are now rented; the group is pursuing demolition for the remaining six properties.² This effort demonstrates that volunteer data-gathering and improvement activities can have an impact.

3. Create Framework Plans through a public process.

By providing planning at the Community scale, rather than the neighborhood scale, Framework Plans will translate the policies of the Comprehensive Plan into planning principles that will encourage a broader sense of common neighborhood issues and connection. The proposed Strategic Opportunity Areas should be evaluated first and become the first Framework Plan areas if indicated by the evaluation. The Framework Plans for each Community should include policies and design principles about infill development and, if relevant, subdivision character; connectivity (pedestrian and bicycle routes, transit, vehicle routes); mixed-use and commercial districts; open space and green systems; infrastructure and services. The Draft Framework Plans should be discussed in public meetings with Neighborhood Associations, other residents, business owners, and property owners in each Community. Then the Framework Plans should be presented to the Planning Commission for approval through a public hearing process and adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan. Existing neighborhood or area plans, including plans created by nonprofits that continue to be useful could also be incorporated in the Framework Plans. Communities that include Strategic Opportunity Areas recommended in this plan are Five Points West/West End, Woodlawn, Northside (Carraway/Norwood), Titusville, and Parkway East.

4. Develop templates for the Framework Plans so that the Planning Department can oversee plans carried out by others.

Given Birmingham's geographically large and diverse area and the City's limited resources, it may be difficult for the Planning Division to create Framework Plans for Communities in a reasonable time frame. The templates would allow the Planning Division to oversee plans that are undertaken by groups other than city government.

In order for a plan to be adopted as part of the Birmingham Comprehensive Plan, the plan must be reviewed by Planning Division staff (if they did not prepare it directly) for conformity with the template and for conformity with the overall goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. If staff did not prepare the plan, they might ask for changes to make the Framework Plan consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, after which the Framework Plan would be submitted to the Planning Commission for a public hearing and adoption.

C. Create a system or consultation structure to ensure communication and coordination with the Housing Authority, School System, Transit Authority, and other government agencies, including county, state and federal agencies with facilities in the city, about location and disposition of facilities so that they further City of Birmingham goals for neighborhood and economic development.

Action

1. Create a Public Facilities Working Group and invite relevant public agencies' facilities staff to meet at least twice a year.

The Planning Division should organize a Public Facilities Working Group, with the Director of Planning, Engineering and Permits as chairperson, to meet twice a year. One of meeting should take place at the time that departments and agencies are developing capital budgets. At the meetings, facilities staff can share information about facility needs, plans for disposition or new construction, and similar issues, and discuss opportunities to support city neighborhood and economic development goals.

² Personal communication.

D. Explore the potential of community schools as neighborhood anchors for residents of all ages, including coordination with recreation programs, health and social services, adult education and fitness, and so on.

The “community schools” movement places health and human service providers, adult education, and other neighborhood-based services into school buildings in order to serve students and their families. Many school districts have adopted this strategy (which is also at the foundation of successful programs such as the Harlem Children’s Zone and the federal Promise Neighborhoods Initiative) to help reform underperforming schools.³ The community schools model is a place-based strategy that can have mutual benefits for schools and for neighborhoods.

When completed, the school facilities improvement program in Birmingham will provide considerably more capacity than is needed for the current enrollment of 25,000 students—giving room to grow the enrollment but also potential for other activities. Moreover, schools are often not used in some hours of the day and evening, or on weekends. Nonetheless, the community schools concept has much to

³ See www.communityschools.org

offer Birmingham. Using the investment in school facilities to provide resources for all members of the community will enhance coordination among educators, parents, social service providers, city departments, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood associations and other stakeholders in support of neighborhood revitalization.

Use of the schools by other entities would require a policy decision by the School Board and approvals from the superintendent and individual principals. Agreements about costs for using school space and facilities would need to be negotiated. Potential partners would be social service agencies that assist children and families, recreation programs run by the Parks and Recreation Department, providers of adult education and work skills training, and community colleges looking for satellite classroom space.

Actions

1. Bring together school system officials, the Education Foundation, city staff, nonprofits, higher education institutions, social services providers, parents, and other stakeholders to explore the community schools, model for Birmingham.

A day-long conference that brings speakers from communities and school districts where this model is being implemented will serve to introduce it to a range of stakeholders in Birmingham. It is critical that the

PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS

This program, administered by the US Department of Education, provides planning and implementation grants to eligible entities, including nonprofit organizations, which may include faith-based nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education. The vision of the program is that all children and youth growing up in Promise Neighborhoods have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career. The inspiration for the program is the Harlem Children’s Zone (www.hcz.org/).

The Promise Neighborhoods Program focuses on:

- Identifying and increasing the capacity of eligible entities that are focused on achieving results for children and youth throughout an entire neighborhood;

- Building a complete continuum of cradle-to-career solutions of both educational programs and family and community supports, with great schools at the center;
- Integrating programs and breaking down agency “silos” so that solutions are implemented effectively and efficiently across agencies;
- Developing the local infrastructure of systems and resources needed to sustain and scale up proven, effective solutions across the broader region beyond the initial neighborhood.

In 2010 and 2011, 36 planning grants and 5 implementation grants were awarded to communities in 18 states and the District of Columbia. Communities that prepare a Promise Neighborhood plan on their own are eligible for implementation grants.

www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html#description

model be presented not just as an education strategy but in a broader context of neighborhood improvement, economic development and City of Birmingham competitiveness. For success, the conference should develop into a long-term sustained effort.

2. Support local efforts to bring a Promise Neighborhood Initiative program to Birmingham.

The Woodlawn Foundation submitted proposals in the 2011 and 2012 grant rounds for a Promise Neighborhood planning grant. Although Woodlawn did not receive the grants, the Foundation and its neighborhood and community partners continue to work together, and where possible, to implement some of the proposed activities.

CHICAGO COMMUNITY SCHOOL INITIATIVE

With more than 150 community schools, Chicago has the largest system of community schools in the country. All schools provide programs in the following areas:

- academic supports for students
- health and wellness access for students and families
- social/emotional health services and referrals for students and families
- social and cultural enrichment
- recreational activities
- adult education and family/community engagement programming.

Community schools remain open after the regular academic day to provide these programs and services in partnership with community-based organizations.

www.communityschools.org/resources/chicago_il_building_communities.aspx

goal 2

Community/neighborhood centers (urban villages) that provide access to retail and services.

POLICIES

- Focus investments to support walkable neighborhood commercial districts, including Main Street districts and compact centers along arterials.
- Locate civic and cultural uses within or adjacent to neighborhood commercial districts to act as anchors.

STRATEGIES

A. Amend commercial strip zoning along arterial roads to promote more compact, mixed-use and walkable commercial districts.

Actions

1. Designate intersections and segments of commercial corridors for different intensities of commercial development and introduce new mixed-use zoning options to create urban village zoning, especially where there are future opportunities for transit stops.

This action will require evaluation of current zoning, boundaries of the Commercial Revitalization Districts that currently require design review, and boundaries of the Main Street districts. Urban village zoning areas may be smaller than these current design review and economic development areas. Urban village zoning would promote and facilitate housing development around neighborhood commercial centers, including design standards for private development that require connections and walkability. Some of these urban villages can be designated as areas for “transit-ready” development. This means that over the long term, these areas will have the development capacity and standards to accommodate higher-density, mixed-use areas that can support enhanced transit, such as express buses, bus rapid transit, and possibly in the more distant long term, light rail. New zoning could be introduced as a mixed-use base zoning district or as an overlay district

and include form-based zoning approaches. However, base zoning must include mixed-use options at central locations.

2. Establish a program to redesign commercial corridors with enhanced streetscapes or parkway-style environments that create more attractive development opportunities.

Many of Birmingham's major streets are unnecessarily wide for current and likely future traffic burdens and are characterized by long stretches of low-density, low-value development with intermittent vacant and blighted segments. Building on the Planning Commission's Complete Streets Policy and the streets included in the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System plan, street improvements that enhance the public realm can help attract beneficial development. Redesigning corridors with enhanced streetscapes and, in some cases, local lanes separated from through lanes, can provide plenty of road capacity. Side roads separated from the through lanes by planted side medians buffer adjacent land uses from high speed traffic and may accommodate parking as well.

Landscape treatments for wide commercial corridors, can include landscaped medians, significant trees (not small shrubs), and landscaped swales for beauty and enhanced treatment of polluted stormwater. Similar strategies combined with the rezoning strategy for urban villages and concentration of commercial activities at specific nodes can make the areas between compact village centers more attractive for multifamily or, in some cases, single-family development. Where the corridors are state roads, the City should negotiate with the Alabama Department of Transportation to develop an approach to urban road improvements that promotes city economic development and urban design goals. In all cases, improvements should be consistent with the safe delivery of utilities. In recent years, many state transportation departments, the Institute of Traffic Engineering, and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials have released guides and manuals on more flexible designs (often called context-sensitive solutions).⁴

3. Improve the function and design for all neighborhood centers, including access management, internal circulation, buildings at the street edge, pedestrian networks, landscaped and distributed parking lots, and similar measures, through enhanced development standards in development regulations.

Over time, significant neighborhood centers should become urban villages in their physical characteristics. This means that both private and public property should be designed to provide functional, safe, and attractive environments for all users—pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motorists. The urban villages must accommodate cars and other motorized vehicles but not be dominated by them. This requires that public realm standards should generally reflect the principles of Complete Streets, including, for example, narrower lanes (to slow traffic speeds and reduce run-off), safer intersection designs (to reduce crashes and encourage crossing in the right place), curb extensions at intersections (to shorten crossing distances), bike lanes (to give bikes the same treatment as cars), and wider sidewalks and street trees (to make walking a safe, pleasant option).⁵

While the physical form of some of Birmingham's neighborhoods still reflects their status as former town centers, in many cases the retail spaces have emptied out and property owners may be tempted to modify their urban form by creating auto-dependent designs. Many of these centers are designated Commercial Revitalization Districts, where the Design Review Committee can work with property owners and businesses to promote walkability and similar desired characteristics. However, it is more direct to provide development standards within the zoning code for private development, so that designs begin with these basic characteristics already incorporated.

4. Use form-based zoning or place-based zoning in mixed-use urban village and commercial corridor locations as a way to promote pedestrian-friendly environments with quality design.

Form-based zoning focuses on the physical form, character and relationships of buildings and the public realm, rather than the conventional zoning approach

⁴ See AASHTO, "A Guide for Achieving Flexibility in Highway Design." www.transportation.org

⁵ The Institute of Traffic Engineers has extensive information on Context-Sensitive Solutions (www.ite.org/css/), including a recommended practice report, *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context-Sensitive Approach*.

focused on control of land uses and development intensity. A form-based code is intended to be an implementation tool created to implement a specific area plan and vision.⁶ Place-based zoning incorporates design and development standards based on best practices in urban design directly into zoning district language. These can be similar to a form-based approach but, in the absence of a detailed plan, can provide more flexibility.

Zoning that promotes quality design can accelerate development and increase values. Nashville has found that districts where form-based codes were established and where there was redevelopment interest resulted in significant increase on property values.⁷

B. When locating city, school, or other public uses, give priority to districts identified in the Comprehensive Plan future land use map as compact, mixed-use commercial districts, such as Urban Village and Main Streets districts.

The City and County can help bring customers to commercial districts by locating civic uses such as libraries, police and fire stations, schools, clinics, and similar facilities in commercial districts. New or renovated public facilities should be pedestrian-friendly and compatible with surrounding development—for example, locating parking to the side or rear of the building and providing windows and articulation on the street façade.

Actions

1. Coordinate disposition of, or development of new uses for publicly-owned properties through the PEP to ensure compatibility with Comprehensive Plan goals and strategies, as well as plans for neighborhoods and commercial areas.

The disposition of publicly owned properties, including schools, located in or near commercial districts, should be preceded by an evaluation of potential uses and urban design strategies that can contribute to strengthening the commercial district. The school district should

work with the City and affected neighborhoods to plan for preferred outcomes in the case of school-building reuse. If disposition and private-sector development of a property is desired, the school district should prepare an RFP that provides criteria for the desired range of uses and the urban design strategy preferred. Transfer to other public entities should also require a commitment to suitable urban design strategies.

2. In future public school improvement programs, work with the State Superintendent and State Department of Education to design schools for urban contexts.

The State Department of Education currently requires large sites for new school construction: 5 acres for elementary schools, 10 acres for middle schools, and 30 acres for high schools, plus an additional one acre per 100 students in each category, making the sites even bigger. The effect of these standards is to make access to schools auto-dependent and isolated from the surrounding neighborhoods. The school building program now nearing completion in Birmingham demonstrates how some schools were built on sites that are not optimally located in relationship to neighborhoods that they serve. A number of states have revised their school building standards for urban schools to require less acreage so that city schools can be integrated into neighborhoods, allowing at least some students to walk or bike to school.

C. Promote the development of business or merchants' associations to serve as the voice of business owners in Urban Village/Main Street districts.

A business or merchants' association organizes business owners to identify and prioritize the issues of most concern to them and serves as the voice and advocate for business interests in a neighborhood district. The existence of such organizations also benefits both the City and neighborhood residents during neighborhood and commercial district planning processes.

⁶ www.formbasedcodes.org

⁷ bettercities.net/article/nashville-values-development-rise-form-based-code-19199

Action

1. Pursue funding to support capacity building for business associations, coordinating with programs for technical assistance and supports for small businesses and microenterprises.

Explore options to work with REV Birmingham to assist small business and micro-entrepreneurs, in pursuing funding to support organizational capacity building among merchants in Urban Village/Main Street districts.

D. Continue to recruit grocery stores and fresh food outlets with a preference for locations in or adjacent to Urban Villages/Main Street districts, and avoid incentivizing fast food outlets.

Grocery stores are important anchors for other neighborhood retail and service businesses, as well as providing access to fresh foods. Fast food locations, particularly in drive-through configurations, do not have the same role in attracting other retailers. Moreover, recent research has shown that the proximity of fast food is more strongly associated with poor diet than the presence of grocery stores is associated with healthy diets.

Communities adopt a number of strategies to recruit grocery stores. These strategies fall into two broad categories: 1) data and marketing and 2) financial incentives.

- **Data and marketing.** There is clear evidence that urban markets can be underserved simply because the buying power of the market is not understood or well documented. Communities can perform their own market analyses to demonstrate market opportunities to potential grocers. The market analysis documents household characteristics and buying power as well as the current lack of supply to tap this market. Because most neighborhoods in Birmingham are not growing in population or households, the city tends to be at a disadvantage in this metric. It is important to show market opportunities at specific locations.
- **Incentives.** Cities employ many incentives to persuade a quality food store to locate in a community. One strategy is to assemble a site of sufficient size to accommodate

a grocery store and to transfer the site to a store for a nominal fee. Other strategies include the use of tax-increment financing to underwrite development costs or tax abatements in order to lower operating costs. Federal New Market Tax Credits have been used to support development of a grocery store in larger, mixed-use projects.

THE ECONOMICS OF GROCERY STORES

Grocery stores apply several criteria when selecting a location. The two primary ones are market potential and site visibility/accessibility.

- **Market potential.** Grocery stores consider the number of households and the character of the competition. Grocery stores typically locate in market areas that are growing. Households spend approximately 10 to 15 percent of total income in food stores. Lower-income households spend a higher share and upper-income households spend a lower share. Approximately 5.7 percent of disposable income in America is spent on “food at home.” To turn a profit, grocery stores need to achieve sales of \$350 to \$500 per square foot of space per year.
- **Location.** Grocery stores prefer sites that have easy access from major thoroughfares. High traffic volume is considered an asset, especially if the site is on the side of the street where traffic volume is high on the trip home from work. Sites visible from the road and convenient to growth areas are valuable to grocery stores as well. For conventional grocery stores, 70 to 80 percent of store sales are derived from households within three miles of the store.
- **Size and supporting number of households.** Supermarkets generally range in size from 50,000 to 75,000 square feet. By definition, supermarkets bring in at least \$2 million in sales per year, although the Food Marketing Institute calculates the average at above \$18 million. It takes \$200 to \$300 million in income or a minimum of 4,500 to 5,000 households in the primary market to support a supermarket. The number of households required to support a supermarket increases with the presence of competition. Smaller stores, like Aldis, range in size from 10,000 to 15,000 square feet. Neighborhood stores can be 5,000 to 10,000 square feet. Two thousand households is the minimum required to support a food store that is not a convenience store.

(Source: W-ZHA, LLC.)

Action

- 1. Identify specific locations for grocery stores or other anchors, preferably in or adjacent to Urban Village/Main Streets districts and other future compact, mixed-use districts, prepare market analyses for these locations, and develop incentives appropriate for specific locations.***

The grocery store map (Figure 7.1) shows grocery stores that are located just outside the city limits, as well as both full service and smaller grocery stores within the city. The map indicates that stores have located on major arterials, a number of them closer to more affluent areas, and in some cases, city consumers are served by supermarkets just beyond the city limits. The nonprofit organization The Food Trust (www.thefoodtrust.org) has been very successful in expanding access to fresh food in Philadelphia and is now working with other cities, such as New Orleans, to develop effective programs.

E. Develop criteria to deploy city incentives strategically, based on data about the ability of localized markets to support desired retail and services as well as understanding of where gaps in market support exist, and coordinate with revitalization planning in efforts to close gaps.

As part of this comprehensive plan, retail market evaluations with estimates of year 2015 retail spending potential for one-mile and three-mile radius trade areas were prepared by BLOC Global for five representative locations in the City of Birmingham: Five Points West, Ensley, Carraway/Norwood, Woodlawn, and Parkway East. These locations were chosen because they represent different conditions, may have been identified as potential transit stations or hubs, or have new or developing assets.

These analyses highlight some of the challenges facing Birmingham as a result of the development and disinvestment patterns of the last generation. All of these trade areas have densities below two occupied households per acre, which is barely sufficient to support bus service at a one hour frequency. The one-mile radius village center locations at this time hardly have enough

households and population to support a small food store. Average disposable income in the Carraway/Norwood and Downtown Ensley areas is substantially below the averages for the other locations. Five Points West and Parkway East, both of which have existing retail destinations that serve regional as well as local customers, have surrounding neighborhoods where consumers have somewhat higher average consumer spending in their three-mile trade areas than can be found in the proposed urban village locations. As the saying goes, “retail follows rooftops.” Successful revitalization will require comprehensive strategies that provide new housing density (rehabilitation and reoccupation of vacant dwelling units and construction of new housing) to support new retail options.

Actions

- 1. Coordinate with city departments and agencies in charge of revitalization planning to ensure that a portion of economic development incentives are targeted to urban villages in Strategic Opportunity Areas where they will have the most impact.***

The City’s economic development office, working with groups such as REV Birmingham and with property owners, should actively encourage business investment in urban villages and the Strategic Opportunity Areas. This effort can include detailed market studies and recruitment of specific business types, identifying priority areas on the city’s website and in its economic development literature, offering expedited permits and licensing, loans or grants for fit out and façade improvement, as well as sales tax rebates when appropriate. Certain kinds of incentives should be available only in priority areas.

- 2. Give priority to public infrastructure improvements in urban villages in Strategic Opportunity Areas.***

Public infrastructure improvements to streets, sidewalks, drainage, and streetscape are needed throughout the city, but, as in other investments, it is important to ensure that a significant portion of these improvements make a visible difference and that they are connected in networks. A portion of the capital improvements budget for these types of projects should be allocated to the urban villages in the Strategic Opportunity Areas. Upgrading the physical infrastructure of these

FIGURE 7.1: GROCERY STORES

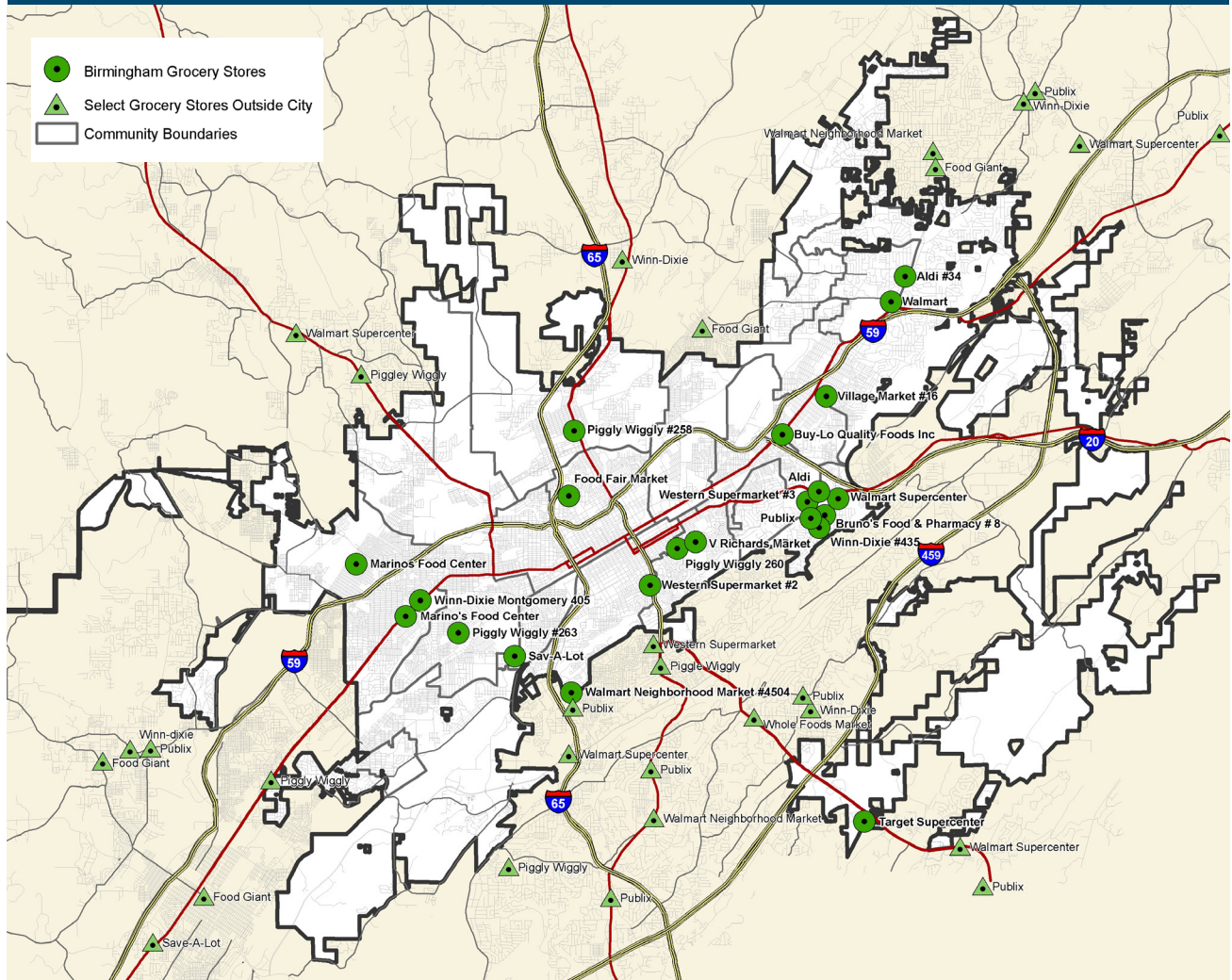


TABLE 7.1: 2015 MARKET EVALUATIONS

	OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS	HOUSEHOLDS PER ACRE	PERSONS	JOBS	JOBS PER ACRE	AVERAGE CONSUMER SPENDING	AVERAGE CONSUMER RETAIL SPENDING	AVERAGE DISPOSABLE INCOME	ESTIMATED 2015 TOTAL RETAIL SPENDING POTENTIAL
ONE-MILE RADIUS (WALKABLE VILLAGE CENTER)									
Carraway-Norwood	3,077	1.53	9,410	14,797	7.36	\$25,471	\$9,136	\$23,342	\$30,972,273
Downtown Ensley	2,503	1.24	6,378	2,147	1.07	\$29,796	\$10,841	\$25,879	\$30,062,130
Woodlawn	3,915	1.95	9,656	3,448	1.72	\$37,516.54	\$13,383.81	\$33,292	\$58,092,168
THREE-MILE RADIUS (GROCERY STORE TRADE AREA)									
Five Points West	34,197	1.89	87,154	28,584	1.58	\$35,379	\$12,703	\$31,115	\$478,499,290
Parkway East	18,421	1.02	46,045	16,708	0.92	\$47,057	\$16,929.49	\$40,356	\$344,197,835

areas will encourage other property owners to make improvements, and help attract new businesses to empty storefronts as well as new mixed use or residential development.

goal 3

City neighborhoods have a good public image.

POLICY

- Support a marketing program for the city as a place to live, work, study, and play.

People coming to Birmingham from outside the region may be the most likely to be interested in living in the city, and they lack preconceived ideas about the city that locals can sometime retain even after conditions have improved. For this reason, it is very important that the city market itself as a place to live.

STRATEGIES

A. Create a marketing plan for the city and work with realtors, major employers, and others to ensure that people new to the region consider the City of Birmingham as a place to live.

Live Baltimore is a public-private organization created to market the City of Baltimore as a great place to live. Established in 1997, the organization was based on a series of community meetings at which participants agreed on the need for new strategies to retain and increase Baltimore City's residential base and to address and balance negative perceptions about city living. Live Baltimore became a fully independent nonprofit entity in 2002. It is funded by numerous community partners including the City of Baltimore, foundations and private businesses. Live Baltimore provides neighborhood profiles, events, amenities, incentives, homebuyer counseling, and other information.

www.livebaltimore.com

Actions

1. **Designate a city staff member to organize a working group representative of government, major employers, realtors, and developers to create a plan and seek funding to support it.**
2. **Develop a web site and marketing materials that highlight living in downtown and city neighborhoods, cultural and park assets, restaurants and food culture.**

Particularly for people considering a move to Birmingham from elsewhere, their first contact with Birmingham is likely to be on the web. An excellent and informative web site is critical to a marketing plan. Because many communities in the region use the "Birmingham" name, it will also be important to distinguish the city and the benefits of urban life from other communities. It may be worthwhile to invest in making sure that the city living website appears prominently at the top of search results.

3. **Create a program, materials and regular events to work with realtors and with major employers such as the health care industry, higher education, financial services, and others to market the city as a place to live so that employees new to the region are not "steered" away from living in the city.**
4. **Create a program of volunteer residents willing to be city "ambassadors" to talk to potential new residents.** Seek volunteers from city residents who work for major employers, young professional groups, entrepreneurs, neighborhood associations, parent groups, retiree groups, etc. A program of this type can be developed by REV Birmingham, the Mayor's Office or a private group and connected with the web site and marketing program. The ambassadors would be given an orientation and should be recognized and thanked in some way, such as an annual dinner.

goal 4

The Citizen Participation Plan continues to serve residents and the City well.

POLICY

- Update the Citizen Participation Plan system.

STRATEGIES

A. Modernize the Citizen Participation Plan system.

Actions

1. In collaboration with residents, review and adjust Neighborhood Association and Community boundaries to reflect changing demographics, physical conditions, and city finances.

The Citizen Participation Plan structure allows for changes in the system, including boundaries, every two years. The most recent changes were in 2004. The Community Development Department and the Mayor's Office for Citizen Assistance can work with the Neighborhoods and Communities to review boundaries in light of data such as demographic trends, number of voters and candidates for offices, meeting schedules, and similar indicators of activity. Birmingham's population of approximately 212,000 is small to support 99 separate Neighborhood Associations organized into 23 Communities. In comparison, Portland (OR), with a

population of 538,776, has 95 neighborhood associations organized into 7 neighborhood districts. The City of Los Angeles has 86 neighborhood councils to represent a population of 3.8 million people. In Birmingham, a smaller number of neighborhood associations with a critical mass of members may be able to provide more effective participation for residents.

2. Explore and analyze citizen-participation systems in other cities to identify best practices suitable to Birmingham.

When it was created, the Birmingham system was a pioneer in citizen participation and a model for cities nationally. However, it was predicated on the availability of federal CDBG funding for neighborhood activities. Over the past four decades, CDBG funding has drastically declined, and Neighborhood Associations no longer receive significant funds for local projects. Today, some larger cities continue to provide significant staff assistance and guarantees of a certain amount of funding for implementing neighborhood or district plans created by the citizen associations. It is not common to see funding allocations to neighborhood associations for any purpose

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS IN OTHER CITIES

Like Birmingham, many cities have established citizen participation programs, and these programs have also suffered from increasing municipal budgetary constraints.

CITY	PROGRAM	FUNDING	STAFFING
Atlanta, GA Population: 420,003	Neighborhood Planning Unit System—24 Advisory Councils; advise on development proposals and zoning change proposals Atlanta Planning Advisory Board—each Advisory Council sends 2 representatives	No public funding	Staff planner from city government is assigned to NPU meetings
Rochester, NY Population: 210,532	Neighbors Building Neighborhoods—10 sector committees, each including multiple neighborhoods Create and implement sector plans	\$5,000 to each sector committee for planning City funds implementation actions, along with business and volunteer efforts	City staff technical assistance—Bureau of Neighborhood Initiatives with 6 staff
Los Angeles, CA Population: 3.8 million	86 Neighborhood Councils Give input to elected officials, city boards and commissions on a variety of issues	City provides \$50,000 annually to each Neighborhood Council to implement the neighborhood plan	City staff from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment
Washington, DC Population: 601,723	37 Elected Advisory Neighborhood Commissions	Commissioners serve 2-year terms with no salary	No staff dedicated to individual ANCs, though staff from various departments have liaisons. Citywide—Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions.
Seattle, WA Population: 608,660	City Neighborhood Council 13 districts made up of multiple neighborhoods Major function is planning	No separate budgets for districts Each district eligible for Neighborhood Matching Fund	Each district has a city-paid staffer

they choose. On the other hand, cities from Omaha (NE) to Greenville (NC) to Dayton (OH) have programs that encourage neighborhood associations to apply for small grants to implement neighborhood projects. Sometimes the programs require “tangible” projects (i.e., not events), and sometimes they require a match. The Montgomery Alabama program is called BONDS (Building our Neighborhoods for Development and Success). Grantees, who may receive up to \$5,000, must provide a 10% match and also must attend training sessions.

The advantage of a competitive grant system is that, rather than spreading small amounts among many groups, it can provide larger grants for bigger projects. In Birmingham, Neighborhood Associations or Communities could then plan for more significant projects, though they would not receive funds every year. Communities or groups of neighborhoods could be encouraged to apply together. The potential downside of a competitive system is that higher-capacity neighborhood groups might have an advantage in preparing, implementing, and leveraging grants. To avoid this problem, a competitive grant system should contain safeguards, such as a requirement that a single association can receive a grant only once in every 3 years, that members of the Community Advisory Board be included in the selection process, and so on.

3. Create a “Capacity College” for neighborhood groups and nonprofits.

Neighborhood groups and small nonprofits need information and technical assistance to help them become more effective. An excellent model is the “Capacity College” created in New Orleans by Neighborhoods Partnership Network, an alliance of neighborhood organizations that is independent of city government. Their Capacity College offers a yearly catalog of small courses on everything from leadership and advocacy to financing and the importance of data. A similar Birmingham effort would need a sponsor and funding and college interns might be utilized. Potential partners might be the Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation, the Community Foundation, the United Way, YWCA, a bank or credit union interested in community development, UAB or Birmingham Southern, Miles College, and possibly, national funders.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

goal 5

The integrity and character of distinctive historic structures and districts is maintained and enhanced.

POLICY

- Coordinate city programs and policies to support historic preservation

Historic preservation efforts in Birmingham have focused on preparing historic inventories for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and on creation of local historic districts that require design review for renovations or new construction. Projects proposed for properties within the 40 National Register districts are also subject to an advisory historic preservation review and consultation by City urban design staff.

While documenting the historic character of the city is undoubtedly important, the retention of that historic character is generally left to market forces. Alabama has a Historic Property Tax Reduction program for commercial properties and a Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program for rehabilitation of both residential and commercial property. Other incentives for residential historic renovation or adaptive reuse are needed as well as a clear strategy for identifying the most important historic resources for preservation. The absence of such a strategy and incentives results in a reactive process when demolition and redevelopment are proposed for a property that some would prefer to see preserved. In the worst cases, the result is “demolition by neglect,” as historic properties deteriorate without appropriate maintenance and preservation or new uses. The major exceptions to this situation are the efforts of REV Birmingham to promote adaptive reuse in several Main Street districts and proposed work by the Woodlawn Foundation.

The local historic district designation tool has been successful in raising housing values in the neighborhoods where it has been applied, which tend to be the more affluent parts of the city. The first local historic district in a low- and moderate-income neighborhood, Norwood, was

FEDERAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION TAX CREDIT

- *Not available to homeowners.*
- *Eligible properties: Income-producing property individually listed on the National Register or a contributing element within a National Register Historic District.*
- *Amount: 20% of construction costs and fees*

STATE HISTORIC PROPERTY TAX REDUCTION

- *Eligible properties: same as federal*
- *Amount: Assessment of state ad valorem tax at residential rate, effectively cutting property tax in half*

STATE HISTORIC PROPERTY TAX REDUCTION

- *Eligible properties: residential and commercial*
- *Amount: Total of \$20M available annually; 25% of qualified expenditures for certified historic buildings used for residential or income-producing purposes; 10% of rehabilitation expenditures for pre-1936 non-historic buildings used for income-producing purposes.*

designated in 2012. If this designation is supported by other policies and investments, the historic district designation will likely have the same positive effect in Norwood.

However, in less-affluent neighborhoods, building rehabilitation practices mandated by historic district regulations are often perceived as expensive, although the design guidelines for historic districts promote repair rather than replacement of historic features, when feasible. It is often more cost-effective to repair rather than to replace historic features. In the process of developing historic design guidelines, City staff works with neighborhood residents to ensure that the guidelines are flexible about the use of alternative materials while still preserving historic character.

Like many other older cities, Birmingham has historic institutional buildings that will need to find new uses, many in the middle of residential neighborhoods. These buildings contribute to the historic character of their surroundings. Schools, churches, and similar historic assets have found new life around the country (and in Birmingham) as housing, arts centers, business incubators and other modern uses. Similarly, Birmingham's industrial heritage is reflected in warehouse and factory buildings. The transformation of the Sloss Furnaces into an industrial museum is the most significant reuse example in the city. Other industrial buildings are vacant

or underutilized and, following the example of other cities, could be converted to incubator space, artist studios, galleries, offices, restaurants, and housing.

STRATEGIES

A. Create a community-based, comprehensive citywide Historic Preservation Plan informed by a broad range of constituencies and interests.

Actions

1. Develop a community-based, 21st-century Historic Preservation Plan for Birmingham.

This plan should involve not only historic preservation professionals and advocates, but also housing, business, and neighborhood revitalization interests; developers and nonprofit housing developers; lending institutions; as well as city and county agencies. The plan should focus on how preservation of the city's historic fabric can contribute to the goals that preservation interests share with advocates of economic development, neighborhood revitalization, affordable housing, and sustainability. The preservation plan should include a vision, goals, strategies and an action and funding agenda for:

- Broadening audiences and support through enhanced interpretation of the links between people and the history of buildings, not just architectural styles.
- Enabling wider participation by persons of limited means and income.
- Achieving more effective incentives to encourage private investment in historic buildings, including property tax relief, granting bonuses to developers of historic commercial buildings in the City Center, and including financial vehicles for closing the gap between the cost of substantial renovation and market values.
- Developing new heritage tourism experiences
- Incorporating preservation into neighborhood and commercial corridor revitalization.
- Adapting cost-conscious rehabilitation materials and practices for application in historic districts.

2. Identify priority properties for preservation by means of a rating system.

Preservation priorities should be established by means of a rating system to help identify the best use of preservation resources and to identify target properties or areas for preservation initiatives. For instance, a point system could be adopted whereby historic resources are given points for: age, integrity of original structure/architectural style, contribution to a historic fabric or ensemble, uniqueness, and so on. The Historic Preservation Master Plan for Arlington County, Virginia, is a good model of a preservation master plan that integrates historic preservation into broader goals with a priority ranking for historic resources. (<http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/Documents/77768-15-06%20HP-Policy%20Rev.pdf>)

B. Raise public awareness for both residents and visitors about all aspects of Birmingham's historic heritage.

Action

1. *Tell Birmingham's story by creating new historic interpretation activities such as heritage walking trails, historic signs/markers, and a Magic City History website, apps, and podcasts to include lesser-known heritage such as industrial history, labor history, architectural history, culinary history, and music history, as well as the city's civil rights history.*

Some of this work could be done through a contest, involving local university faculty and students, and collaboration from the Birmingham Historical Society, the Convention and Visitors' Bureau, and other groups. Self-guided walking trails and historic markers could be developed in conjunction with implementation of the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System.

goal 6

Historic preservation initiatives support and invigorate community/neighborhood renewal.

POLICY

- Support programs and incentives for historic preservation that renew neighborhoods and commercial districts, and further economic development.

STRATEGIES

A. Promote rehabilitation of historic properties with incentives.

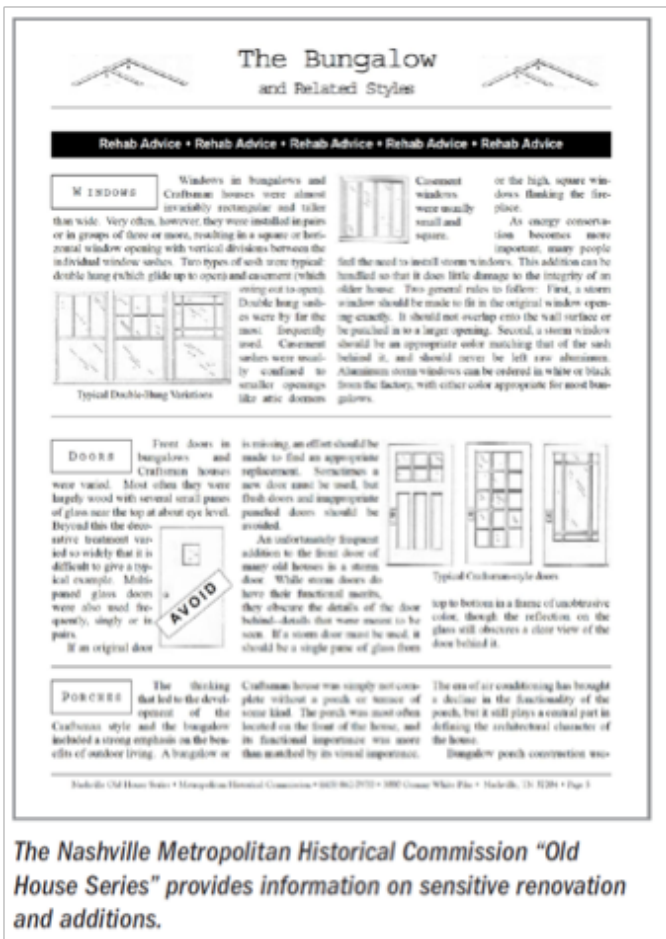
Actions

1. *Provide a tax credit or abatement for residential historic restoration activities in National Register Districts and in areas targeted for strategic revitalization (Strategic Opportunity Areas).*

Cities ranging from Baltimore to Tyler, Texas, have instituted city tax credits to promote restoration of historic buildings. Even where property taxes are low, as is the case in Alabama, a tax credit or abatement for five to ten years can be an inducement to spend the money on historic properties whose market value may otherwise be too low to justify investment.

B. Consider creating Neighborhood Conservation Districts.

Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCDs) provide a mechanism for differing levels of review—from advisory to fully regulatory—for demolition and exterior changes to buildings within a defined area that has a recognized character, but is not a local historic district. Typically, conservation districts are defined by a study of the area that highlights an identifiable neighborhood character and recommends which kinds of changes should be subject to review. Review standards are tailored to the special character of each district. NCDs can be administered



by a local historic preservation commission, planning commission, municipal staff members, or a special neighborhood conservation district commission. They are sometimes included in zoning ordinances and sometimes enacted as separate ordinances for each conservation district.

Actions

1. Enact an ordinance establishing a system for creation and implementation of Neighborhood Conservation Districts.

Conservation districts based on neighborhood action and that encourage voluntary compliance—rather than mandatory review—may be better suited to Birmingham, rather than a more formal approach with mandatory design reviews, which require more staff, funding, time, and capacity. (A voluntary approach could still issue certificates or other indications that a given project has met the established standards.) A number of cities have conservation districts under

various names. These cities include San Antonio, Dallas, and Austin in Texas; Memphis and Nashville in Tennessee; Roanoke (VA); and Atlanta.

Elements of a neighborhood conservation district system that could be suitable for Birmingham include:

- Written request by a Neighborhood Association to begin the process.
- Neighborhood study to identify key aspects of neighborhood character. In order to conserve staff time, the City of Austin has developed a system for the neighborhood study that uses neighborhood volunteers. The planning department provides conservation district advocates with maps and helps them develop a form to use in surveying every property in the proposed conservation district. This information then serves as the source material for neighborhood meetings on what elements to include in design review.
- Neighborhood meetings and discussion to identify what building or site elements, if any, should be subject to review, advisory or mandatory standards.
- Clear and simple guidelines to facilitate rapid review.
- Majority approval by property owners of record required for establishment of the district.
- Birmingham Historical Commission and City Council approval required for establishment of the district.
- Administrative review by the Urban Design staff with appeal to the Birmingham Historical Commission, which is the appeal body for local historic district design review cases.

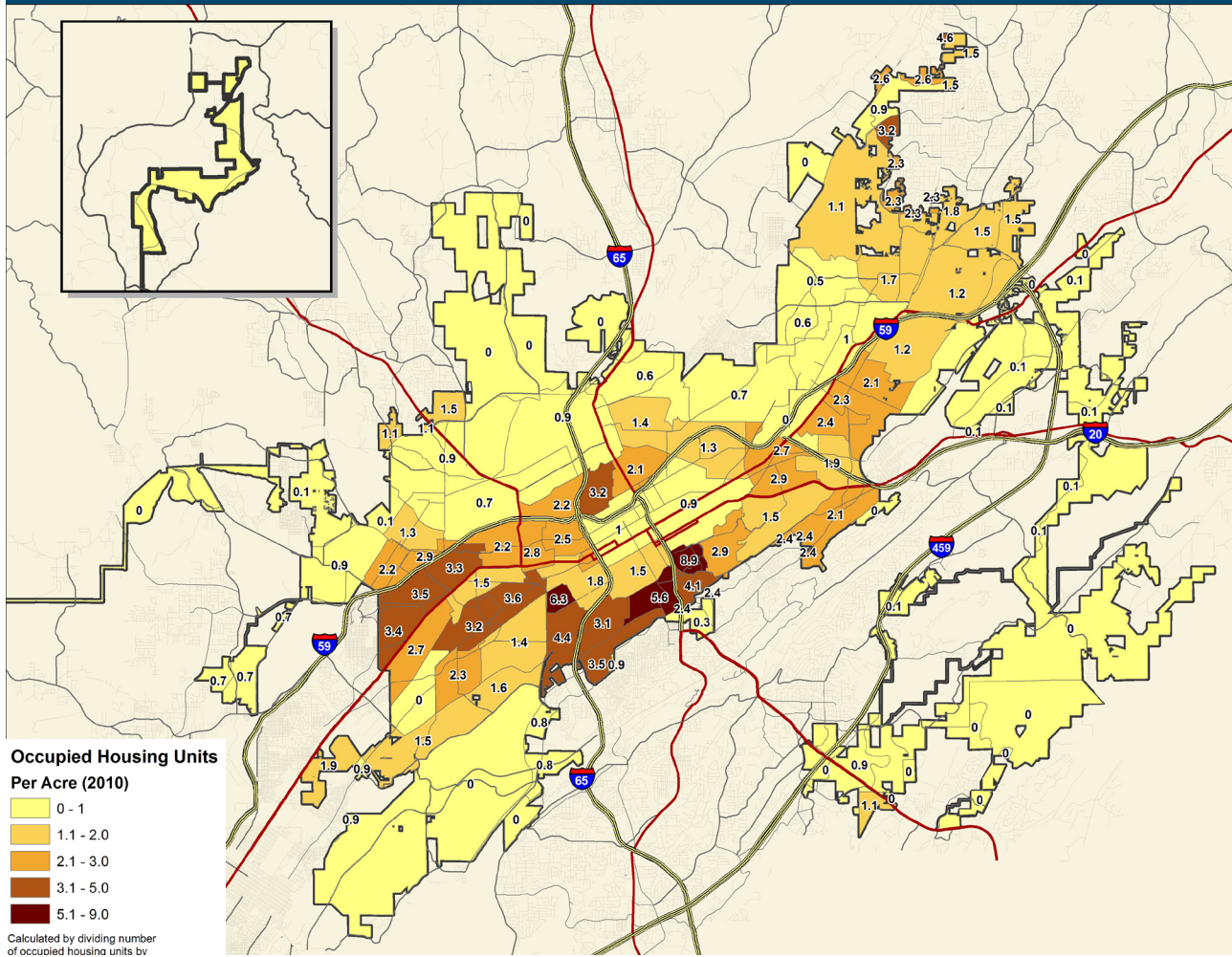
C. Provide guidance on affordable building materials and components that are appropriate for houses with historic value.

Action

1. Create a guidance document for the most common historic building types in Birmingham that includes information on appropriate and affordable options for rehabilitation and renovation.

Other cities have created information sheets on building types, such as bungalows, that could be used or easily adapted to Birmingham. In addition, home

FIGURE 7.2: OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS PER ACRE



improvement retailers such as Home Depot or Lowe's could be approached for support and collaboration, as well as architectural salvage businesses.

Warehouse (Fairhope), siteone.com/shop/architectural/; Rescued Relics in Montgomery, oldalabamatown.com. Rescued Relics was created by the Landmarks Foundation as it restored Old Alabama Town in Montgomery.

D. Promote salvage of architectural elements and materials from historic buildings in major renovations or demolitions.

Action

1. Include architectural salvage as an element of renovations or demolitions in projects to which the City contributes through tax abatements or other means.

There are several architectural salvage private businesses in Alabama: Southern Accents Architectural Antiques in Cullman, antiques-architectural.com; Architectural Antique

HOUSING POLICY

Twenty-first century trends favor a return to cities. Markets increasingly favor historic, walkable neighborhoods inside cities. Fuel costs are making long commutes more expensive. Changing demographic trends also favor city living because people are waiting longer to marry and have children, while at the same time they are living longer. People typically spend more of their lives in childless households than during the time they have children at home. In surveys, the generation known as the "millennials" or "Generation Y," born in the 1980s and 1990s, has expressed a strong

desire to live in diverse, walkable neighborhoods with a strong sense of community. And finally, as the commitment to greater energy efficiency and sustainability grows, people are recognizing that urban centers are more environmentally efficient.

TABLE 7.2: U.S. HOUSEHOLDS		
	1960	2010
Without children	52%	67%
Single person	13%	27%

TABLE 7.3: HOUSEHOLDS IN THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM		
	2000	2010
Without children under 18	67%	73%
Single person households	34%	38%

SOURCE: US CENSUS

Surveys by the National Association of Realtors on housing preferences have found that although people value community factors such as high quality public schools (75% very or somewhat important), city-style characteristics like sidewalks and places to take walks are among the top community characteristics people consider important when deciding where to live:

- Two-thirds (66% very or somewhat important) see being within an easy walk of places in their community as an important factor in deciding where to live. Specifically, being within an easy walk of a grocery store (75%), pharmacy (65%), hospital (61%), and restaurants (60%) is important to at least six in ten Americans.

- Improving existing communities (57%) and building new developments within existing communities (32%) are seen as much higher priorities than building new developments in the countryside (7%).
- Improving public transportation is viewed as the best answer to traffic congestion by half of the country (50%). Three in ten (30%) prefer building communities where fewer people need to drive long distances to work and shop. Far fewer want to see more roads (18%).⁸

While many families with children left the City of Birmingham in the 2000-2010 decade, reflecting lack of confidence in the school system, it is important to recognize that it will take time to turn around perceptions and reality for the Birmingham Public Schools. While school improvements are underway for the medium and long term, the city should take advantage of opportunities to attract households without children: young singles and couples, empty nesters, and retirees looking for low-cost locations with cultural amenities.

Housing policy. The City of Birmingham at present has no real housing policy to promote both market rate and affordable housing. Some neighborhoods have functioning

⁸ "The 2011 Community Preference Survey: What Americans are looking for when deciding where to live." Analysis of a survey of 2,071 American adults nationally, Conducted for the National Association of Realtors®, March 2011

THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT (HABD)

- *Much of HABD housing is old, obsolete and difficult to maintain (built in 1940s).*
- *The Park Place and Tuxedo HOPE VI projects and the modernization of Harris Homes and Cooper Green are prototypes for improvement.*
- *Tenants are primarily young working families, some seniors and disabled.*
- *One development, Freedom Manor, has 98 units for elderly only. It is always full with a waiting list. As the population ages, an additional elderly-only development will likely be needed.*
- *Programs include Family Self-Sufficiency for both HABD families and for Section 8 families; Section 3 Program—every vendor has to provide jobs and training funds for HABD clients (housing and Sect. 8).*
- *Choice Neighborhood Initiative grant 2012 application for comprehensive planning and revitalization at Loveman Homes and the Titusville neighborhood.*
- **Environmental justice issues:** *Collegeville, N. Birmingham, Morton Simpson, and Kimber Homes are all adjacent to industrial sites.*
- **HABD has a nonprofit arm:** *Magic City Housing Development Corp. The goal is to raise \$1 million for scholarships to college and career training for people who live in assisted housing. In its first year it held golf tournaments and awarded \$55K to families.*
- **Infill homeownership program:** *The City provides the land (sometimes vacant, sometimes with a structure that needs demolition). Sixty houses have been built in 10 years with a current pace of about 20 houses a year. HOPE VI projects can provide funding for more infill housing, such as 86 houses to be built in the Tuxedo Community on Housing Authority property.*

housing markets and continue to attract private buyers and private investment. In many other parts of the city, the private housing market is nearly nonexistent because of widespread blight, vacancy, and numerous tax delinquent properties. The City needs new market rate housing (new construction, renovation, and adaptive reuse) and improved assisted housing for low income households in the city. The Housing Authority of Birmingham District (HABD) has the strongest role in affordable housing production in the city and the greatest potential access to funding. The nonprofit housing development sector is small and relatively weak.

goal 7

A comprehensive housing policy to support quality neighborhoods.

POLICY

- Support a community-based system to develop and implement a citywide housing policy that includes stakeholders from government, the nonprofit sector, and the private sector.

STRATEGIES

A. Create a publicly-accessible source of data on housing markets and housing needs as part of a broader property information system.

Chapter 8 (pp. 8.9–8.10) calls for a robust property information system as the foundation of an overall community renewal and revitalization strategy. This system should include housing market data.

Action

1. Commission a detailed real estate market study (Market Value Analysis) of the entire city to identify market conditions on as fine-grained a level as possible, ideally using census block groups.

This type of analysis has proven very valuable in Baltimore, Philadelphia and other cities to guide decision-making about strategic investments by public

and nonprofit entities. The indicators typically applied in a real estate study of this kind are:⁹

- Median and variability of housing sale prices
- Housing and land vacancy
- Mortgage foreclosures as a percent of units (or sales)
- Rate of owner occupancy
- Presence of commercial land uses
- Share of the rental stock that receives a subsidy
- Density

This analysis will help in identifying and promoting locations where additional private investment can enhance neighborhood stability and improvement and where limited public investment can help create conditions propitious for private investment. Investment in data systems is being promoted by the Federal Reserve and other groups. The kind of real estate analysis discussed here was pioneered by The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), a nonprofit community development financial institution.

B. Create a Housing Policy Advisory Council.

The purpose of this Council would be to bring together representatives of all the groups active in the housing sector to develop city policies that would have two fundamental purposes: 1) promote market rate and mixed income housing investment and 2) improve housing availability for low-income residents. The Council would include representatives of city staff, neighborhood organizations, the Housing Authority of Birmingham District, for-profit and non-profit developers, realtors, and representatives of economic development organizations. Today, these groups have contact only around project permitting—if at all. For example, there is no established venue in which HABD and City departments jointly discuss the role of HABD projects in strategic revitalization. Activities would include development of policies that promote mixed-income, diverse housing environments that support City of Birmingham goals for neighborhood development and revitalization; reduce concentrations of poverty; identify

⁹ See Ira Goldstein, The Reinvestment Fund, “Market Value Analysis: a Data-Based Approach to Understanding Urban Housing Markets,” *Putting Data to Work: Data Driven Approaches to Strengthening Neighborhoods*, 2012. www.federalreserve.gov/publications/putting-data-to-work.htm

and support opportunities for rehabilitated and new market rate housing; and promote housing investments that help create neighborhoods rather than “projects.”

Actions

1. Organize a Housing Policy Advisory Council to be staffed by the Community Development Department and the Planning Division of PEP.

The Council should be staffed by the Community Development Department and Planning Division and meet at least three times a year and include the following activities:

- Review and analysis of housing data, needs and opportunities.
- Development of policies that promote market rate, mixed-income, and diverse housing environments and reduce concentrations of poverty.
- Review of new standards for new and rehabilitated market-rate and subsidized housing that create neighborhoods rather than projects by requiring integration with surrounding areas.
- Annual report on housing conditions, needs, priorities, and policies to the Mayor, Council, and the public.
- A public hearing on housing needs, priorities and policies at the Planning Commission once a year.

2. Focus a portion of the City’s CDBG and HOME funds on the Strategic Opportunity Areas.

The City expends its federal entitlement funds across the city, and because need is so great, rehabilitation and other programs typically close soon after opening. After the 2011 tornado, some of the funds were focused on rebuilding efforts in Pratt City. A similar procedure of focusing a portion of these funds strategically should become the rule. The City’s most recent community development reporting documents to HUD express the need to begin geographic targeting. This targeting should occur within the context of investments being made in the Strategic Opportunity Areas, and particularly where the funding can contribute to transit-supportive or transit-ready development.

C. Maintain and expand market rate housing choices.

Actions

1. Work with Neighborhood Associations to support services and conditions in stable neighborhoods so that their housing markets continue strong.

The Neighborhood Audits recommended in Action 1.B.2 (p. 7.9) can provide information to support this action.

2. Identify niche market segments, such as retirees and Millennials/Generation Y, prepare marketing materials, approach potential appropriate developers and market the city to these segments.

A market analysis and marketing campaign focused on niche markets can identify opportunities for Birmingham, particularly among households, consisting of empty nesters, retirees, young singles, and young couples. This does not mean that all members of these demographic groups would want to live in the City of Birmingham, but that there is a strong “urban-inclined” segment within these groups and Birmingham can do more to capture a larger share. Suburban communities like Homewood have been creating walkable urban precincts, increasingly providing competition to Birmingham as places to find an urban lifestyle in the region.

The Millennials, the largest generation in American history, have been obsessively studied by the real estate industry. Though many of them grew up in the suburbs, they don’t want to live there. They tend to be “urban-inclined,” that is, they are attracted to the kinds of environments that are more common in cities or close-in suburbs than in other suburban or rural locations. They want to walk or bike everywhere, rather than drive; they accept less living space in exchange for access to community shopping, dining and recreation. Parts of downtown Birmingham are already attracting members of this young demographic, and the urban village centers proposed for the Strategic Opportunity Areas could also be increasingly appealing, as long as they provide walkability, community amenities, and, ideally, good bicycle or transit connections to the rest of the city. Members of the Millennial generation who have

already made the choice to live in Birmingham and who are enthusiastic about city living should be consulted and involved in marketing efforts to young professionals and other Millennials.

Kiplingers in 2011 listed the Birmingham metropolitan area as one of the top ten areas for retirement because of low cost of living, exemption of most retirement income from state income tax, low to nonexistent property taxes, and affordable medical care. “And in Birmingham, the state’s largest city, these amenities come with huge Dixie charm. It is home to an opera, orchestra and ballet, as well as a segment of the renowned Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. Top selling point: Big-city living at a Deep South discount.”¹⁰ The Oxmoor area, with its proximity to the Red Mountain Park, as well as the golf course, would be an appealing location for new development targeted to retirees and designed in a walkable village format, perhaps on a condominium model that would provide landscape maintenance and similar services. The residents would have easy access both to outdoor activities and to the cultural center downtown.

There are numerous marketing programs for retirement that could serve as models for Birmingham. Unlike Alabama, Mississippi has an official state program to attract retirees called Hometown Mississippi Retirement, which evaluates communities that want to become Certified Retirement Cities. *AlabamaAdvantage.com* is a commercial site that is mostly focused on planned communities, none of which are in Birmingham.

The 2004 Center City Plan included a downtown residential housing market analysis and implementation of the plan resulted in residential renovations of existing buildings and new construction that brought significant growth in downtown population by 2010. An update to the downtown market analysis is due in 2014.

3. Develop a revolving loan program with design guidelines for small developers to do infill renovation and new construction in neighborhoods with attractive housing stock and nearby amenities.

Neighborhoods where there are mostly intact blocks with appealing bungalows and other historic housing types, tree-lined streets, and walking access to parks or other amenities, can attract small developers to create renovated and new market-rate housing. Financing through a revolving loan program can be attached to design guidelines, in order to ensure the new housing fits into the neighborhood. A technical assistance program would also be beneficial and could be funded with small grants.

D. Coordinate public sector capacity in housing policy implementation and build nonprofit sector capacity in housing production.

Actions

1. Create a public sector subcommittee of the Housing Policy Advisory Council.

The subcommittee would be made up of all public entities implementing housing policy so that there is regular communication, information sharing, and opportunities to collaborate among, for example, HABD, PEP, Community Development, and the Birmingham HUD representative. Through this subcommittee, the Planning and Urban Design Divisions of PEP can work with HABD planning, design and development into the city’s overall planning and urban design strategies.

2. Seek grant or foundation funding for a fund to support capacity building and training for nonprofit organizations in the housing sector.

Birmingham has a small nonprofit housing sector. Local organizations are generally not large and tend to provide services such as foreclosure prevention and homebuyer counseling rather than create renovated or new affordable housing units. Production of housing units by nonprofits, whether renovations or new development, also tends to be very limited compared to the need. Because organizations are small and compete for the

¹⁰ <http://www.kiplinger.com/slideshow/Great-Retirement-Cities-in-the-US/2.html>

same limited funding, they sometimes find it difficult to collaborate effectively. At the time this comprehensive plan was being written, the continuing decline in CDBG and HOME funding to entitlement cities like Birmingham means that city funding for the nonprofit housing sector is unlikely to grow.

Birmingham has not attracted the interest of national housing and community development organizations such as LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation, www.lisc.org), the nation's largest community development support organization, working in 38 regional programs; Enterprise Community Partners (www.entrprisecommunity.com), founded by developer James Rouse, which recently created a Building Sustainable Organizations initiative in 11 regions; or Living Cities (www.livingcities.org), which in 2011-2013 has chosen five communities in which to invest: Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, Newark, and the Twin Cities. However, another national organization which has a model they call the Capacity Building Institute, already has an affiliate in Birmingham: Seedco Financial. Although the Birmingham affiliate focuses on small business and micro lending, it could provide connections to the national organization for capacity building.

Because nonprofit housing production and business development is more demanding than neighborhood association advocacy, the Capacity College recommended earlier may not be the right sponsor for this kind of initiative, which needs to be more specialized. However, a capacity building program targeted at housing nonprofits and community development corporations who wish to develop housing should be part of the overall strategic community renewal program discussed in Chapter 8 (pp. 8.9–8.20).

E. Encourage the development of homeless prevention programs, foreclosure assistance, and supportive and transitional housing for residents who are at risk of homelessness and/or are living in substandard housing.

In order to be eligible to apply for federal grants, governments and organizations that serve homeless persons must organize in a Continuum of Care Consortium and prepare a plan. In 2007, Continuums were required to prepare Ten-Year Plans to end homelessness that concentrated on a “Housing First” policy to get homeless persons into permanent housing and then provide for their medical or other needs. This policy emerged from studies that have conclusively shown that the most effective strategy to combat chronic homelessness is permanent housing. Many chronically homeless persons have mental illness, substance abuse problems, or both. Permanent housing with supportive services has been shown to be more effective in helping the person and much less expensive for the community, which otherwise spends large amounts of money on emergency care for a relatively small number of people.

Although Birmingham did not experience the extreme housing bubble and crash that some other cities experienced during the 2000s, predatory lending and foreclosure rates are high, and the city's high percentage of low-income households with few resources means that there are many households that may be one paycheck away from homelessness. A housing policy that recognizes and provides for decent, affordable housing for these households—whether market rate or subsidized—will continue to be essential in Birmingham. Emergency and transitional housing is needed for people in a variety of difficult situations, from victims of domestic abuse to people released from jail who have nowhere to go.

Action

1. Continue implementation of the Birmingham Continuum of Care program and Ten Year Plan to end homelessness.

The City of Birmingham's Consolidated Plan for 2010-2015 states that the City will continue to

support emergency shelters, will add 100 new units of permanent housing for homeless persons who can live independently and provide aggressive case management for 100 persons to help them get out of homelessness.

goal 8

All housing is in good condition and code compliant.

POLICY

- Support effective and efficient code enforcement efforts.

STRATEGIES

A. Establish systems to support and coordinate code enforcement and other quality of life regulations.

Residents in all neighborhoods desire more effective code enforcement. In many ways, code enforcement is the first line of defense against neighborhood deterioration. The goal is compliance, which can be voluntary (preferred) or enforced. For Birmingham, the overarching goals are to eliminate or secure vacant buildings; enhance property maintenance; improve sanitation; mitigate nuisance activities (like drug selling or using); and to support neighborhoods by visible enforcement.

Actions

1. Create a single code enforcement division for both residential and nonresidential code enforcement and seek advice on reforming the system to work better for the community and to be more cost-efficient.

Currently, the residential and nonresidential code enforcement staff are located in separate offices. The code enforcement staff agree that it would be more efficient and enhance communication for them to be located together. Baltimore's code enforcement reform is a best practice (see box).

2. Include code enforcement, public safety, and public health information on the property level in the property information system recommended in Chapter 8, Strategy A.1 (pp. 8.9).

Lack of good information makes it much more difficult to be effective in code enforcement. A detailed property database can be created incrementally.

3. Establish a registration and inspection system for rental properties.

Many communities have a registration and inspection system for rental properties to enforce codes and decent living conditions. Inspections occur when rentals turn over. The landlords pay a fee to cover the cost of inspection.

4. Consider creating a ticketing system with fines for quality-of-life offenses such as littering and illegal dumping, storage of junk cars, lack of mowing, and noise.

Many communities have developed ticketing systems with fines for quality-of-life offenses. Not only do these programs improve neighborhoods, but there is

Successful Code Enforcement Reform in Baltimore

Baltimore is a model for code enforcement reform that has made the process faster, more efficient, more proactive (not just waiting for complaints before acting)—and has saved the city money.

"Deputy Commissioner Michael Braverman and his colleagues at Housing Code Enforcement (HCE) have... a new approach to turning over vacant properties that takes on urban blight and much more. That's a promising proposition in a city where 16,000 vacant properties degrade neighborhoods, harbor drug traffickers and other criminals, and erode economic vitality and the tax base. Braverman and the HCE crew began by building internal capacity and reengineering and automating processes. They reduced enforcement response times from 14 days to four, and they reduced the time it took to "clean and board" vacant properties from over a year to 10 days, while doubling the volume of service requests from 15,000 to 30,000. They eliminated a backlog of 7,000 "clean and board" requests. These improvements brought in almost \$7 million in new revenue. HCE also wrote its own software to automate workflow and violation notice production and integrate with the city's 311 phone system. Placing the workflow data on the Web promoted accountability and improved productivity. It also saved more than \$400,000 in data entry costs."

Source: <http://www.governing.com/columns/mgmt-insights/Smart-Management-and-the-Turnaround-of-a-City.html>. (Also see http://www.communityprogress.net/filebin/pdf/rvp_cont/presentations/TC_Leeper-BascosBraverman.pdf)

considerable evidence that they help cut crime. At the same time, funds from the fines can help pay for the cost of enforcement. Birmingham's Environmental Police at one time were tasked with enforcing quality-of-life violations, but they were transferred to the Public Works Department, and only one Environmental Police officer remains in city government. Because enforcement of quality-of-life crimes may put officers in harm's way, they should be given the training and resources necessary to perform this work safely. A reassessment of the Environmental Police program is needed.

goal 9

Quality housing to meet the diverse needs of households at all income levels and all stages of the life cycle.

POLICY

- Support the planning, regulatory and funding initiatives needed to provide a diversity of housing types, rental and ownership, market-rate and assisted, to meet community needs.

STRATEGIES

A. Review and revise regulations and systems to ensure appropriate standards and guidelines for fitting new housing into existing neighborhoods.

The character of Birmingham neighborhoods suffered over the last 40 years as poorly designed small multifamily buildings and other developments were constructed. This was one of the reasons that zoning in the Highland neighborhood was modified with a form-based design code. Appropriate and appealing design is important to strengthening housing markets.

Action

1. Make appropriate changes to the permitting process to ensure that all private projects that have public financing or other assistance are reviewed by the Urban Design Division for urban design and fit.

Establishing basic urban design standards in the zoning code will raise the level of all new development. Projects with public financing or incentives should be subject to an internal, informational design review by the Planning Department Urban Design staff, regardless of zoning. This requirement should be written into any agreement for City incentives, assistance or financing.

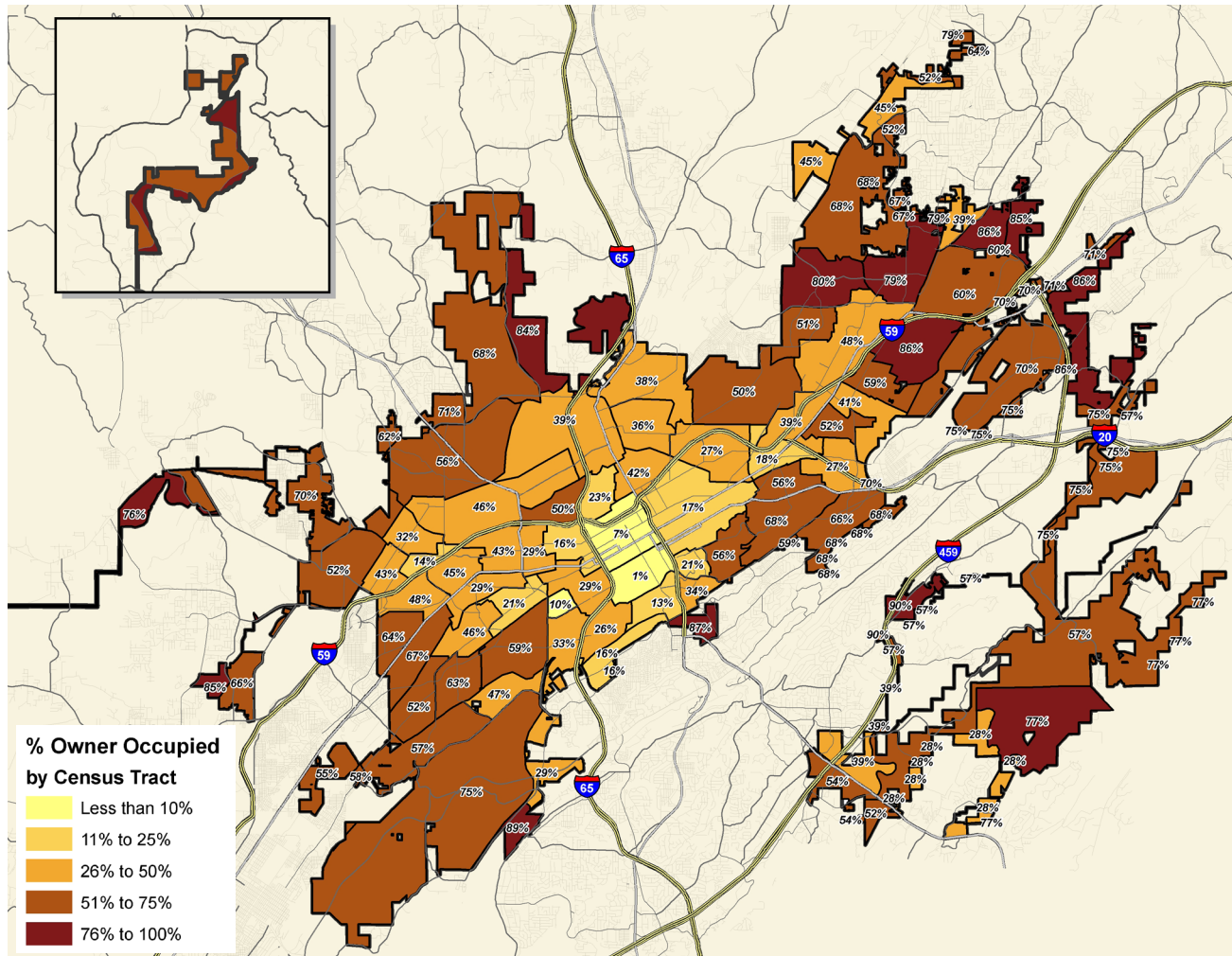
B. Explore employer-assisted housing programs with major employers.

In cities such as Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Philadelphia, and Hartford, hospitals, universities, institutions and other large employers who have a major investment in their location, have created programs to help improve their urban neighborhoods—for example, employer-assisted housing. In some cases the institutions provide downpayment assistance for employees to buy homes nearby, and in other cases the institutions have participated in housing renovation and development programs to improve neighborhoods and attract their employees to live there.

Examples of Employer Assisted Housing include:

- **Regional Employer-Assisted Collaboration for Housing (REACH):** Through REACH Illinois, more than 1,800 employees have bought homes since 2000. www.reachillinois.org
- **Baltimore City Live Near Your Work:** A minimum \$2,000 grant or conditional grant to employees for settlement and closing costs to purchase homes in targeted neighborhoods near their employers. Baltimore City will contribute up to \$1,000 per employee, which will be matched by the participating employer. <http://www.livebaltimore.com>
- **First Homes, Rochester:** Employer-supported Community Land Trust housing. www.firsthomes.org

FIGURE 7.3: HOMEOWNERSHIP



- **University of Pennsylvania West Philadelphia Initiatives:** Employees of the university can receive a five-year for-givable loan of \$7,500 to purchase a house in a targeted area of West Philadelphia. The loan can be used for a down payment, closing costs, or home improvements. www.upenn.edu/campus/westphilly/housing.html

Action

1. Explore employer-assisted housing options targeted at city neighborhoods with Birmingham's major employers.

Birmingham's major institutions have a long-term investment in the viability and success of the neighborhoods where they are located and overall in

the City of Birmingham. UAB, St. Vincent Hospital, Princeton Baptist Hospital, Birmingham-Southern College, and other employers could be approached and asked to set up employer-assisted housing programs individually or contribute funds to a joint program that could be administered by the City or a nonprofit organization. The First Homes program of Rochester (MN) is one example of a program created by the local community foundation with donations from the city's major employer, the Mayo Clinic, as well as other businesses. This program is now based on the Community Land Trust model (see Chapter 8, p. 8.12) that separates ownership of the land in a long-term trust, from ownership of the building.

C. Getting Started

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Create a Housing Policy Advisory Council that is broadly representative.	Mayor with advice from PEP and Community Development
Enact a rental housing registration and inspection ordinance.	Mayor, Council, City Attorney, Community Development
Enact a property tax abatement program for renovation of historic properties.	Mayor, Council, City Attorney, Planning Division
Create a template for Framework Plans for Communities.	PEP—Planning Division
Put code enforcement for residential and nonresidential properties together in a single department.	Mayor and Chief of Operations
Assign planners to attend community meetings as requested, work with residents to create plans, identify needs, develop solutions, and provide technical assistance; also to work with the Mayor's Offices of Citizen Assistance and Economic Development, the Community Development Department, the Housing Authority, the MPO, local institutions and other organizations that can affect neighborhood life.	Planning Division
Work with the Citizens Advisory Board and constituent organizations to modernize the CPPP.	Mayor's Office of Citizen Assistance; CAB; City Council